

BRIEFS

NO BR ISSUE ON DEC. 24

Due to postal regulations that limit The Baptist Record to 50 issues per year, the newspaper will not publish on Dec. 24. The next issue will be dated Dec. 31 and has been closed out. The first issue of the new year will be dated Jan. 7. Deadline for news items for the issue of Jan. 7 is December 31. Deadline for advertisements for the issue of Jan. 7 is December 24. For more information, contact editor William Perkins at wperkins@mbcb.org, or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651.

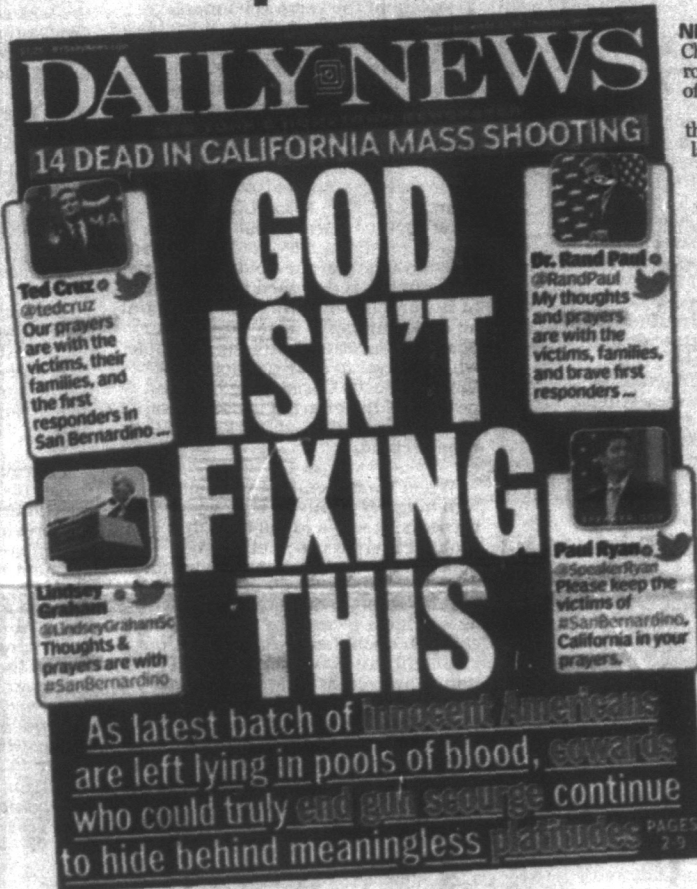
PRO-LIFE MIDWIFE LOSES COURT CASE

JÖNKÖPING COUNTY, Sweden (BP) — A district court in Sweden recently ruled against midwife Ellinor Grimmark, who was denied employment at four hospitals because she refuses to participate in abortions. "As a midwife, I want to exercise a profession which defends life and saves lives at all cost," Grimmark said in a statement printed in the Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet. "Are healthcare practitioners in Sweden to be forced to take part in procedures that extinguish life, at its beginning or final stages? Somebody has to take the little children's side, somebody has to fight for their right to life."

TENN. BAPTISTS ADOPT BF&M

MILLINGTON, Tenn. (BP) — Messengers to the Tennessee Baptist Convention annual meeting amended their constitution and bylaws to require members of boards and committees to act in accordance with the Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M). "It is important that we clarify that BF&M has never been a creed and it is not being used as a creed in this report. It is a minimum statement of our faith," said Larry Robertson, pastor of Hilldale Baptist Church in Clarksville. Messengers will vote on a similar proposed amendment at the 2017 Mississippi Baptist Convention annual meeting.

So. Baptist leaders slam headline



NEW YORK CITY (BP and local reports) — Right on time at Christmas, a headline in the New York Daily News is being roundly criticized by Southern Baptist leaders for its description of God as helpless to stop mass murderers.

The headline referred to the massacre that occurred in San Bernardino, Ca., at Inland Regional Center, a state-run facility for individuals with developmental disabilities. Two heavily-armed Muslim extremists, dressed in tactical attire and who turned out to be a husband-wife team, opened fire at a party located inside the building, killing 14 and wounding 17 more, according to the Los Angeles Times.

The gunmen were shot dead on a city street by police, while allegedly moving toward their next target in a rented SUV.

"I'm hard-pressed to think of a more cynical and exploitative headline at a time of national mourning," Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, told the Washington Post.

Author Rich Shapiro wrote in the first line of the accompanying story, "Prayers aren't working," and quoted a tweet referring to gun control by U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) before pronouncing, "Your 'thoughts' should be about steps to take to stop this carnage. Your 'prayers' should be for forgiveness if you do nothing — again."

Emma Green, in an article for The Atlantic, called the sharp critique "prayer shaming." She said, "There's a clear claim being made here, and one with an edge: Democrats care about doing something and taking action while Republicans waste time offering meaningless prayers." Green noted, "This cynicism offers a view into just how much religion and politics have changed in the United States."

R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., addressed the issue in his podcast, The



MOORE



SHAPIRO



MOHLER

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Arab attacks flair again in Israel

NEW ORLEANS (BP) — Arab-on-Jewish violence has erupted again in and around Jerusalem in recent weeks. Many of the attacks are inspired by viral social media images rather than calls from religious or political groups. The weapon of choice for these daytime acts has generally been a knife rather than a gun.

Some of the Arab attackers are citizens of Israel and some are women. What has caused this within the nation of Israel?

An oddity of these events is that most of the attackers have little to no involvement in Palestinian political groups. Viral videos seem to be the unifying factor for those who have stabbed Israeli soldiers, policemen, and ordinary citizens.

Some of the attackers viewed footage of demonstrations and riots sparked by the perceived threat of Jewish destruction of the Al Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount, one of Islam's most holy sites. While Israeli political leaders have repeatedly declared their commitment to the latest Status Quo agreements reached after the Six-Day War of 1967 for freedom of



ASSAULT IN REAL TIME — Viral footage of a young Palestinian woman attempting to stab a guard at a government checkpoint has heightened already-high tensions between Israel's Jewish and Arab populations. (Screen capture from YouTube)

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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

We're strange?

Christmas has morphed into many things in the past 2,000 years. From what started as the birth of an eternal Savior in a simple barn surrounded by some of God's lower creations, we have arrived at the point where celebrity-endorsed shoes and junk jewelry have crowded out the significance of the original message.

The proverbial camel, which has had his nose in the tent for some time, is now all the way inside. Many retail giants opened for business late on Thanksgiving Day, which at least gave excited shoppers time to hurriedly gobble down their Thanksgiving Dinner. Not to be outdone, other major retailers doubled down by opening all day on Thanksgiving Day.

It's always been a remarkable sight to see adults, otherwise well-socialized, jostling and threatening each other outside a store at 3 a.m. on Black Friday while waiting to buy fancy underwear on sale. With people on the other side of the world being beheaded by the thousands and whole countries struggling to contain the greatest infectious threat to the human race since The Plague, it would appear our priorities are somewhat misplaced — to put it politely.

Thanksgiving Day, like Sundays in this country, has become just another routine 24 hours on an endless shopping calendar. Nothing special there. Look for Christmas Day to soon suffer the same fate. When that happens, the stripping away of all things spiritual in America will be virtually complete.

That is, the stripping away of all things Christian. Islam will still be welcomed and promoted in public schools, where children will continue to be forced to practice praying to Allah. Planned Parenthood will still be able

to openly teach young people how to overcome their natural modesty, and thereby increase their ghoulish marketing of baby parts when the inevitable happens. Grown men will be still allowed to use women's bathrooms and locker rooms because he (she?) is really a woman on the inside.

Highways will continue to be slaughtering grounds due to the alcohol lobby's control of our government. Big Gambling will likewise still be able to ruin lives for the same reason, while carting money by the billions out of Mississippi. There will be more attacks like Paris, Colorado Springs, and San Bernardino. Evil will continue to be defended by the most powerful communications cartels in the country.

Funny how the Christians hate to see adults, otherwise well-socialized, jostling and threatening each other outside a store at 3 a.m. on Black Friday while waiting to buy fancy underwear on sale. With people on the other side of the world being beheaded by the thousands and whole countries struggling to contain the greatest infectious threat to the human race since The Plague, it would appear our priorities are somewhat misplaced — to put it politely.

What can we do? Pray, give, and go. Our most powerful tool as Christians is to pray. Secondly, for the billions of people who need to hear the Gospel, we must give so the people God has called can go tell them. Finally, we must go ourselves.

With that formula, we can help win Mississippi and the world to Jesus. Let's pledge to make 2016 the year that Great Commission command actually becomes a reality (Matt. 28:18-20).

Our giving, our hearts

One of the most often quoted and best known verses of the Bible in the entire world is John 3:16. I remember witnessing to a young man years ago who stated that this was the only Bible verse he knew. He had seen it so many times on signs at sporting events that he actually looked it up. That was a great launching point to share the Gospel with him.

It truly is one of the greatest verses in all of God's Word! One of the things I love about the verse is its message that God is the great Giver. It begins by saying, "For God so loved the world that He gave ..." Our God demonstrated to us that giving is a great way to express love. For the believer, giving is a great spiritual discipline that expresses the very heart of God.

Our giving should also express our heart. The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions, which is promoted by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, is designed to remind us of the urgency of giving and is certainly an opportunity for us to express our heart of concern for billions of people who have yet to hear the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. One hundred percent of the offering is used to support Southern Baptist workers on the mission field.

When I was a child, I remember watching my family as they opened presents. It was a joyful time, but I thought there was something odd about my father's actions. He would get a few gifts as we all did, but he never wanted to open them. In fact, he was most pleased by watching his children open their gifts. At the time, I thought this was a very unusual reaction. However, as I became a father and later a grandfather, I began to understand why my father acted that way. He simply loved to give and watch the recipient open the gift. I have tried to become like that in my adult life. It is a great way to express one's heart of love.



Guest opinion with Frank S. Page

In my role with the Executive Committee, I have the opportunity to travel extensively both nationally and internationally. I like to tell people that I am the luckiest man in the Southern Baptist Convention because I have a front row seat to see what is happening across our nation and around the world.

As I have traveled to places like Spain, Cuba, Mexico, Germany and Canada, I have seen God working in powerful ways. Over the years, I have visited every continent except Antarctica and have seen God at work everywhere I've been. As we give, we provide the means for ministry and missions to take place in powerful ways.

Do you love people? Do you love the lost? Do you love those who have not yet heard? God does, and we should as well. One of the greatest ways to express our love is by giving as Jesus did. Let us give of our resources, our time, and our prayers. Let us be great givers like God.

I encourage you to do your part to make this year's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering the greatest by far over any previous year's offering. I ask you to join me and my family in a commitment to being givers. What better way to be an example to others than through a sacrificial offering to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering? Let's make sure we give more than ever before so that the Gospel can go further than ever before.

Page is president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee in Nashville, and former interim pastor of First Church, Jackson. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press. Edited for style.

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LifeWay manager feels compelled to return

NASHVILLE (BP) — Eight years ago, Becky Loyd swallowed her fear and climbed onto a plane bound for Moldova. Because of that decision, she'll spend this Christmas season delivering slippers, pajamas, and hope to hundreds of abandoned children.

Because of that decision, two brothers 5,000 miles away have begun to call her, "Mom." Tudor was 12 years old and Jony was nine when she met them in an orphanage on that first mission trip in 2007.

Loyd, marketing manager of adult ministry for LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, now talks online with them every day. "We talk about God. We talk about money. We talk about girls sometimes," Loyd said. "I'm the closest thing they have to a mom, and they are the closest thing I have to kids. We're just figuring out how to be a family."

This month Loyd will travel again to Moldova, a small former Soviet republic sandwiched between Romania and Ukraine.

"When these kids in orphanages receive a gift, it may be the first gift they've ever received," Loyd said. "They have nothing to give, but they will give you everything they have."

"It changes your whole perspective on Christmas."

Although Moldova is a poor nation, Tudor and Jony live in an area with Internet access and Loyd helped them buy phones. Technology quickly transformed Loyd's newfound family, just as it has changed how she does her job. At work, social media keeps her connected with LifeWay customers. "We're doing online Bible studies with thousands of women — lots of touch points to engage women and churches."

With Tudor and Jony, technology breaks down language barriers for Loyd. "The Google Translate app has really changed my life," she said. "Sometimes it's just, 'How was school today?' but I've had some pretty intense conversations. Jony is taking English classes, so it was the best day ever when he asked, 'Will you help me with my English homework?'"

Getting a tourist visa from the Moldovan government is a challenge, Loyd said. So far, she's been unable to bring Tudor or Jony for a visit to the United States but she's managed to arrange a surprise trip.

The brothers will fly on a plane for the first time. "It's a really cheap flight from Moldova to Vienna, so that will be their Christmas. They get to go and experience a new country," Loyd said.



TOGETHER AGAIN — Jony (right), Becky Loyd (center), and Tudor in Moldova in 2015.

Loyd wasn't sure what to expect when she first reached Moldova in 2007. The poverty was unsettling, but the children touched her heart. "I remember knowing God had called me to be an advocate for them and not knowing how to do it."

She just kept going back. Year after year she returned to the same orphanage, getting to know the kids, doing summer camps with them, watching them grow. Tudor and Jony became Christians. So did many others.

Now, some of those orphans have become leaders — directing music, acting as translators, and sharing the Gospel with other orphans, Loyd said. "It's neat to see them turn around and not be ministered to but instead pour out what the Lord has given them."

Saints player hopes, writes for racial reconciliation



ONE IN CHRIST JESUS — New Orleans Saints tight end Ben Watson shakes hands with an unidentified fan before signing a copy of his new book, *Under Our Skin: Getting Real About Race — And Getting Free from the Fears and Frustrations that Divide Us*. The book calls for racial reconciliation in Christ. As each person in the waiting line stepped up for a signature, Watson penned his name and beside it, "Gal. 3:28." (BP photo courtesy of New Orleans Seminary)

NEW ORLEANS (BP) — Race is an issue that continues to divide, said New Orleans Saints tight end Benjamin Watson during a book signing inside the LifeWay campus store at New Orleans Seminary. The solution is changed hearts in Christ, Watson said.

The event fell on Nov. 24, the one-year anniversary of the ruling in the racially charged Ferguson, Mo., case of the shooting death of Michael Brown. Watson's book, *Under Our Skin: Getting Real about Race — and Getting Free from the Fear and Frustrations that Divide Us*, expands on his lengthy Facebook post that resonated with readers the day after the news broke that officer Darren Wilson would not face criminal charges for the shooting death of Brown.

"[Race] is something that keeps on coming up," Watson said. "It's something we're always talking about and it's not seeming to be going anywhere."

Calling his book "part manifesto, part memoir," Watson told the line of fans that snaked past shelves and out LifeWay's door that he put his thoughts to paper after seeing a public reaction to the verdict that seemed to split along racial lines.

"I was conflicted because so much was tied into it. I wanted to work out my thoughts," Watson said. "I didn't even know how to post," he quipped, adding he had to call on a friend for help. Soon afterwards, Watson found himself behind the microphone taking questions on the issue of race. The book followed.

New Orleans Seminary President Chuck Kelley noted, "Clear. Honest. Thoughtful. Distinctly Christian. This is how you talk about complex, emotional issues. This voice and this issue need to be part of a national conversation to push us closer to becoming the country, the church of our ideals, Watson gives us a terrific model on how and why Christians must engage in all conversations about things that matter."

The chapter titles give clues as to Watson's feelings after the Ferguson verdict: Angry, Intropective, Embarrassed, Sad and Sympathetic, Offended, Encouraged, and others. His book and Facebook post, which included words that later became chapter titles, call readers to examine attitudes and thoughts.

For some, it is a call to repentance, Watson told the crowd. For others, it's a call for forgiveness, he added.

Written with Ken Peterson, the book came together during the off-season and through late-night consultations during the Saints' summer training camp, Watson said. In the book, Watson draws from personal experiences such as being pulled over while driving his wife Kirsten to the hospital for the birth of their first child, or how one of his white high school teammates took an unexpected step toward reconciliation.

"Really, the whole point and hope of 'Under Our Skin' is that you find your place along this whole racial narrative and that you're able to take time to think about some of the deep-seated issues or prejudices that you may have," Watson said.

Yolanda Hingle, a mother of three sons and co-leader of a New Orleans-area teen girls' ministry, said she was nervous about meeting Watson because she doesn't follow football.

"After he spoke for only a few minutes, I realized that this man was so much more than just a football player," Hingle said. "He is a strong man of God. He is a family man. He's a man that seeks to further the Kingdom of Christ while breaking down racial barriers and just happens to be a talented football player."

In the opening chapters of the Bible, above and beyond the great truth that God spoke the worlds into existence, is the enormous, pulsating truth from God's heart that He wanted to have a relationship with each of us. Can you imagine a beautiful evening in the Garden of Eden when God came to talk with Adam and Eve? It's hard to conceive how wonderful life was in that perfect garden — an uninterrupted, unspoiled relationship and fellowship with the living God. Everything in the garden was theirs but for one tree. God said do not take of that tree. Adam and Eve chose to do what God told them not to do, and sin entered our world. It was devastating not only for Adam and Eve but for the heart of God who longed to be in relationship with them, but now a barrier existed because of sin.

Sin is always a barrier between God and His people, between people and people, between nations and races. Our determination to have our will, over and above what God's will would be, always separates. It inflicts pain and death. Even with His own creation disobeying and rebelling, God was not willing to stay away. He could have just as easily dismissed Adam and Eve and all of us, but He was filled with such determined love and amazing grace that He would reach out to bring us back to Himself. God announced it to His people through men who were called prophets. He showed His great care through miracles and defied logic, but ultimately His great plan unfolded in the presentation of His Son in a manger in Bethlehem. He came to us even though we had rejected Him and run from Him. He came to us.



God Came to Us

It is the message of Christmas from the beginning of time to the end of the age, for at Christmas God Himself came to identify with us. John tells the glorious events and describes it this way: "And the word was made flesh" (1:14). Words are the expression of thought, and these thoughts from the mind and the heart of God — the word became flesh — took His thoughts and His expressions and enveloped them in human form in a baby whose name was Jesus. He did not just send word to us that He loved us and that He had a plan that would save every one of us, He came and identified with all that we were as He offered all that we could be. He took on our burdens. He experienced our temptations, yet without sin. He walked among us and traveled down the roads that we travel. He saw all around Him how sin had broken relationships

and ruined lives. He came and identified with us. He was not a far-off, distant god who was aloof and untouchable and even uncaring. No, He came and identified with us.

A minister friend of mine and his wife have collected nativity scenes through the years. At last count they were approaching 100 scenes. Most every Christmas, they would put many of them on display. As they also gathered children, the problems grew of putting out the nativity scenes and protecting them from little hands. One of the nativity scenes they had picked up somewhere along the way was a set of figures that were cushy like little pillows and washable if something happened to them. With some preschool kids in their home, guess which nativity scene they liked the best and guess which one the parents allowed them to have and play

with all they wanted? You got it — the one they could hold and hug, play with, and maybe in a moment of disagreement even throw one of the characters at one of the other children. It was that one that was available to them, that identified with their world. It is Jesus that you and I have been given from heaven, for He comes to identify with us in our great needs and our big problems.

Jesus also came to inform us. John said, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (1:14). He brought us the truth about God. In John 3:16 where we find, "For God so loved the world..." in the context of the following verses that say He came not to condemn but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:17). Our God is a righteous God, but His passionate desire is to save everyone. The message of Christmas ultimately is that Jesus has come to instigate the reconciliation of humanity with its Maker.

He is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. He came so that each of us — dislodged from His presence, disengaged from His will, and disturbed by our own sinfulness — could be reunited and wonderfully ignited by the very presence of God. Today, this Christmas, the Bible says that if you will turn from your sin and turn to the Savior we celebrate, He promises that whoever comes to Him, He will not reject. Today is your day to trust Jesus as your Savior.

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College News

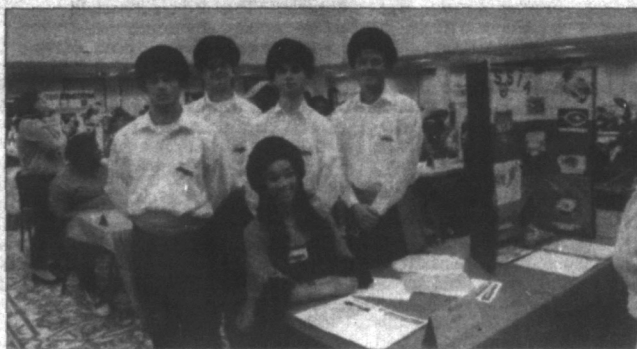


Bailey Hill (right), a **WILLIAM CAREY UNIVERSITY** junior from Thomasville, Alabama, receives a gift from Santa Claus and his helper, sophomore Sawyer Walters of Hattiesburg, during Carey's Winter Festival at the Hattiesburg campus on December 3. The festival was part of Carey's Christmas festivities, which also included the hanging of the greens, the lighting of Christmas decorations, a vespers worship service and a dinner.



Twenty-one **WILLIAM CAREY UNIVERSITY** students were inducted into the Alpha Beta Circle of the Omicron Delta Kappa national leadership honor society on December 3 at the Hattiesburg campus. —Pictured are (first row, from left) Lynne Houston, assistant professor of education and the circle's faculty secretary; Jay Richardson, assistant professor of history and the circle's faculty sponsor; Arthur Bienvenu Jr. of Carriere; (second row, from left) Jessica Boyette of Biloxi; Chemapuwa Tinago of Harare, Zimbabwe; Lydia Ulrich of Moss Point; Hannah Cook-Kelley of Phoenix, Arizona; Sara Grace Golson of Hattiesburg; Mary Hannah Lott of Hattiesburg; Houston Saxon of Lumberton; (third row, from left) Courtney Payton of Hattiesburg; Brittney Brown of Poplarville; Mary Courtney of Lumberton; Lauri Tuohisto-Kokko of Espoo, Finland; Jonathan Giangrosso of Mount Olive; Amanda Campbell of Picayune; and Tyler Harrison of Seminary. Not pictured are Ashlee Champagne of Ocean Springs; Matt Gatlin of Petal; LaToya Govan of Hattiesburg; Austin Henderson of Petal; Adrienne Madden of Purvis; and Ashtyne Reid of Sumrall.

The Mississippi Council for Economic Education sponsored the 7th annual international summit at **MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE**. A total of 49 nations were represented at the conference which attracted 200 high school students to learn more about the impact of the world's business climate. Shown are Ocean Springs students representing Russia.



In other College News:

► A major thoroughfare to the William Carey University Hattiesburg campus has been renamed William Carey Parkway. The Hattiesburg City Council unanimously approved the renaming of Helveston Road and one block of Penton Street. The renamed street connects US 49 to Tuscan Avenue.

Women in combat? Argument rages on

WASHINGTON (BP) — The U.S. Department of Defense's decision to open all military combat positions to women has rekindled a theological and practical debate on the role of women in battle.

"It is no shock that a secular society that has embraced feminism and transgender ideology is now confused about gender roles and war," Owen Strachan, associate professor of Christian theology at Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., and president of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, told Baptist Press.

"Men have no idea who they are today. Their grandfathers bled out on the beaches of Normandy to save civilization, but most men have no functional concept of masculine self-sacrifice. We men ask women to provide for us, to do all the work around the house, to discipline the kids, and even to die for us. These are shameful days."

In a Dec. 3 announcement, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said "there will be no exceptions" to permitting women to enter elite combat forces "as long as they qualify and meet the standards," according to The Washington Post. About 220,000 jobs, some 10% of the American military, have been closed to females but will open Jan. 2.

Among the previously closed jobs are positions in the Navy SEALs, Army Special Forces, and Marine Corps infantry.

Carter's decision capped a decades-long loosening of restrictions on women in the military, including a 2013 decision by then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to lift the ban on women serving directly in ground combat units.

Strachan said Scripture teaches that men should protect women and children, a

principle with obvious application to military service. "Christian men read our Bibles. We see godly warriors raised up by God to defend His people and honor His name."

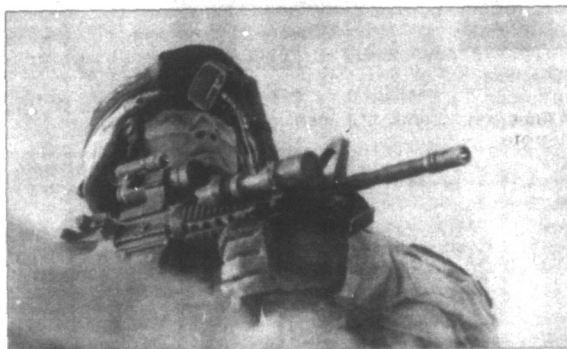
"We don't skip over the parts about David's mighty men, Joshua, Solomon, and men of martial virtue. These stories are burned onto our hearts. We see them reflected in the Western tradition. Our pulse moves faster when we hear of Churchill, De Gaulle, MacArthur, and the men they led into battle against evil adversaries."

"Christian men know that war is terrible. We do not ask for it; we confess with Augustine that war must be just to be fought. But we also know this: there is one thing... worse than dying — being a coward."

On the opposing side of the debate, Mimi Haddad, president of Christians for Biblical Equality, said Scripture and history both point to the qualification of women for combat service. "Women's military acumen dates back to biblical women like Jael who singlehandedly rescued Israel by skillfully subduing Sisera and pounding a tent peg into his head, Judges 4:21," Haddad told BP.

"While history is scant on details, women served in the Special Forces and even on the front lines in WWI and WWII, though they rarely received equal benefits or recognition for making the same sacrifices as their male peers."

"Like women missionaries who flooded the world's most dangerous corners, often outnumbering men two to one, women have never shied away from danger when a higher goal might be attained. The question should be: Is the person qualified to serve, not what is their sex."



NOT ACCEPTABLE — A recent directive from the U.S. Department of Defense opening all military jobs to women — including combat and elite forces — has drawn the ire of some conservatives and religious groups. (BP photo courtesy of archive.defense.gov)



Advent process draws interest from Southern Baptist churches

NASHVILLE (BP) — The late Southern Baptist seminary preaching professor Calvin Miller once quipped to Christianity Today that many Southern Baptist churches "probably could hardly spell Advent" in the early 1990s. Not so any longer.

In at least two holiday magazines this year, LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention has published Advent devotional books that include tips for observing Advent. North Carolina's Baptist newspaper, the Biblical Recorder, commends Advent to its readers and offers a list of Advent resources.

Southern Baptist congregations across America light Advent candles weekly. Many of those churches purchased from LifeWay. So why the shift?

Church historian Stan Norman said Baptists have begun to see the usefulness of traditions once viewed as too liturgical or high church. Advent wreaths, calendars, and readings "seem to provide a bit of structure in a tradition that has maybe gone too far without structure," Norman, provost of Oklahoma Baptist University, told Baptist Press.

The focus on Christ inherent in Advent celebrations is needed "in a cultural context in which we are battered on every side to be diverted away from that," Norman said.

Derived from a Latin word meaning "coming," Advent refers to a four-week period of preparation in Western churches leading up to Christmas. For most believers who observe it, Advent is a time of reflecting on Jesus' first coming and preparing for His second coming.

Advent became a recognized Christian festival in the sixth century, some 400 years after followers of Jesus began to celebrate Christmas, said Michael Haykin, professor of church history and biblical spirituality at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He noted some evidence of

fasting by believers in preparation for Christmas during the fourth century.

An Advent sermon preached by Pope Gregory the Great around A.D. 600 may be evidence Advent had gained official recognition by then. The festival was a staple of the Christian calendar by the High Middle Ages (1000-1300), Haykin, a told BP.

Change came with the Protestant Reformation, when there was "a trimming of the calendar by all of the Protestants" in an effort to bring church activities in line with the instructions of Scripture, Haykin said.

Anglicans and Lutherans maintained Advent. Puritans — British and American Christians who sought to purify the Church of England in the 1500s and 1600s — believed churches should eliminate all worship practices without clear biblical warrant. They included Advent in that category. In fact, they eliminated all Christian celebrations except the Lord's Day.

Early Baptists, with many of their roots in Puritanism, "would have shared that sort of attitude," Haykin said.

Not until the late 1700s did Baptists' aversion to Christmas start to shift, with English pastor John Ryland, for example, preaching a Christmas sermon. By the mid-1800s, Baptists began to celebrate Christmas more broadly, Haykin and Norman said.

Basil Manly Jr., one of Southern Seminary's founding professors, wrote in an 1867 letter that "a custom has sprung up, since the [Civil] War began, of having a Christmas tree." London pastor Charles Spurgeon said in an 1891 sermon that while "perhaps it is not right to have the birthday celebrated," he would "say nothing, today, against festivities on that great birthday of Christ."

Yet even as Christmas celebrations expanded among Baptists,

Norman said, Advent remained unpopular because it was seen as a vestige of high church traditions including Roman Catholicism. "Not until probably the middle of the 20th century did we see an openness to actual Advent being incorporated," he said.

Among the early expressions of Advent's blossoming was a 1965 Advent devotional book by R.L. Middleton published by the Baptist Sunday School Board, LifeWay's precursor organization. However, the book did not use the term Advent. That same year, the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee defended the celebration of Christmas generally in its publication The Baptist Program.

Today's proliferation of Advent observance may be part of a "pushback" against the contemporary worship movement as believers seek increased "solemnity" and "sobriety," Norman said. Haykin said Advent helps contemporary believers set themselves apart from a world that is more "hostile to the Christian faith" than the world of Puritans and early Baptists.

Allan Blume, currently the editor of the Biblical Recorder, was one Baptist pastor to incorporate Advent into his Christmas celebration for the reason articulated by Haykin. In 35 years of pastoral ministry, Blume found Advent was "a time to keep the focus on Jesus daily in the middle of a season that keeps drawing our attention to material items."

Blume wrote in a Recorder editorial, "I had heard of Advent but always brushed it aside as something only liturgical churches did. I learned it is a very popular tradition in Germany, the homeland of my family name."

"I began a multi-year investigation into the history of the Advent tradition. The more I studied, the more I wondered why evangelicals were missing out on all of the rich meaning and pure joy of Advent celebrations."

Just for the Record



CALVARY CHURCH, SILVER CREEK, presented a children's musical, *Star of Wonder*.

In other Church News:

► **Eastside Church, Pearl**, is having a New Years Eve gospel singing Dec. 31, 6:30 p.m. Artists include Tim Frith & Gospel Echoes; The Revelations; the Pearl Quartet; and Sons of Faith. Love offering.

► **Coldwater Church, Philadelphia**, will ordain Clay Winstead to the gospel ministry Dec. 20, 6 p.m.

► **First Church, Runnelstown**, will host The Primitive Quartet in concert Jan. 1, 7 p.m. Love offering.

► **Johnny C. Halderman** was ordained as a minister Nov. 29 at **Pleasant Grove Church, Gore Springs**. He is pastoring Sherman Church, Calhoun County.



CALVARY CHURCH, VICKSBURG, held a children's Christmas program. Pam Storey, director.



PINEVIEW CHURCH, LAUREL, held baptism services Nov. 20. Shown, front, is Issac Page; middle row, Robert Tidwell, Betty Taylor, Shelia Busby, and Aaron Busby; back row, Tim Nelson, and Alan Busby, who baptized his wife Shelia and son Aaron.



The WMU Joy Ladies Group, **FIRST CHURCH, MT. PLEASANT**, made diapers for babies in Haiti. The group is also collecting and cleaning medicine bottles for Malawi, Africa. Shown are Carol Gardner, Bobbie Loftin, Mae Felts, Allene Teel, and Sarah Bolden.



BETHANY CHURCH, PRENTISS, hosted its second annual Christmas Benefit Dec. 5, with all proceeds donated to the Baptist Children's Village. Walt Grayson, guest speaker. Shown are Grayson, Jo Grayson, pastor Lee Falter and his wife Jordan.



NEW BETHEL CHURCH, CARROLL COUNTY, presented a children's Christmas play, followed by a congregational meal and gathering around the Christmas tree.



IMMANUEL CHURCH, GREENWOOD, held a deacon ordination Dec. 6. Shown are deacon chairman Russell Robertson and Brian Anderson.



EMMANUEL CHURCH, GRENADA, recently ordained Johnny Halderman.



The men's ministry of **CALVARY CHURCH, PETAL**, held its annual fish fry in November with approximately 40 members attending.



NEW HOPE CHURCH, LEE COUNTY, presented the Christmas cantata "Believe." Lowell Johnson, pastor; Brent Sanders, music minister.

FCL KIPOP PFGL, G FX: FCL RI PSFBB
 PII MSI PYC YE XFC PGMMGCN YC MSI
 ZGNSM SFCL YE DYTIZ, FCL AYGXCN GC
 MSI ABYOLP YE SIFWIC.
 XFZV EYOZMIIC: PGUMR-MTY

Clue: $X = I$

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: John 3:16

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Schools' stances on Christmas scrutinized by religious groups

UNIVERSITY, Ms. (BP and local reports) — The University of Mississippi in Oxford has come under fire for the Student Activities Association's decision to rename a Christmas-related activity from "Grand Ole Christmas" to "Hotty Toddy Holiday," supposedly to accommodate the school's diverse student population.

"We really wanted to, kind of like, change the atmosphere from last year and that would explain the name change," said Kayp Maye, SAA co-director of special events, in an interview on the student-led cable television channel NewsWatch99. "Grand Ole Christmas" was just, it connoted too much Christianity on campus and so we wanted to have a more inclusive environment for the holidays this year."

After the move garnered national headlines and condemnation from religious groups, the school's administration released a statement that read, "The university's vice chancellor of student affairs, Brandi Hephner LaBanc, was told by a student that his quote to the news media about the event, 'Hot-

ty Toddy Holiday,' was taken out of context and that he had insufficient time to give a thoughtful answer. He said the quote does not accurately express his Christian faith or the reason for the name given to the event."

"This is a 21-year-old student who wanted to make all students feel welcome and come to this annual event," the vice chancellor said. "He is very sincere in his wish that he had expressed himself better. It is unfortunate that these reports, including repetition of incomplete information on social media, have misrepresented the nature of the event and his intent as a Christian to welcome people of all faiths and backgrounds."

"This student organization led a celebration that continued to honor Christmas traditions while welcoming all students to a holiday gathering."

Meanwhile, for the second time in recent months the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (UTK) has removed a controversial Web post from its diversity office after state officeholders threatened funding cuts and called for employee resignations and terminations.

A December website post urging UTK employees to respect a diversity of beliefs when hosting parties during the Christmas season has been dropped in favor of a more general message posted on the UTK website.

"As we enter the holiday season, please be mindful of the rich diversity of our campus community," the revised post reads in part, and makes no specific mention of Christmas. "Recognizing a wide variety of cultures and beliefs, we should note that people choose to celebrate in different ways and on varying days of the year."

That's compared to the original posting days earlier that urged university employees to avoid any "emphasis on religion or culture," to "ensure your holiday party is not a Christmas party in disguise," and to "not play games with religious and cultural themes" such as "Secret Santa."

As recently as September, the university dropped a diversity office posting by UTK Pride Center director Donna Braquet that instructed students and faculty in using what were described as "gender-neutral pronouns" of "ze" and "xyr."

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PROVIDENCE BAPTIST CHURCH IN HATTIESBURG IS SEEKING EITHER A FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME STUDENT MINISTER. Please send resume to 1180 Eatonville Road, Hattiesburg, MS 39401, or email to secretary@provbc.org.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ELLISVILLE IS SEEKING A FULL-TIME YOUTH MINISTER. Send resumes to First Baptist Church, attention: John Howard Robertson/Search Committee, 302 E Holly St., Ellisville, MS 39437 or email: efbcyouthmin@gmail.com

WE ARE SEEKING A BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR. Please send resumes to enonbaptistchurch@outlook.com or mail them to Enon Baptist Church, 2604 Carrollton Rd Grenada, MS 38901 attn: Laura Cook.

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COPIAH COUNTY BAPTIST ASSOCIATION SEEKING PART-TIME ASSOCIATION MISSION DIRECTOR. Please send Resumes to: Mr. Larry Papizan, Copiah County Baptist Association, P.O. Box 230, Hazlehurst MS 39083

NEEDED: FULL TIME OR BI-VOCATIONAL MINISTER OF YOUTH AND CHILDREN AT ASHLAND BAPTIST CHURCH IN ASHLAND, MS. Send resumes to Mr. Stanley Poff, P.O. Box 35, Ashland, MS 38603 or email to stanleypoff@yahoo.com



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ATTACKS

cont. from p. 1

access to the site, it has done little to lessen the volatility.

Others have viewed footage of previous Arab knife-wielding attacks on Jewish residents. Footage of a young Palestinian woman who stabs a Jewish man, and her subsequent treatment by Israeli security forces was viewed by Arab men who later used knives to strike out at Jews.

In recent days, the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) has issued Hebrew-language threats against Israel and global Judaism. These speakers claim solidarity with the current violence in Israel and support for the perpetrators. Clearly ISIS has no organized presence in Israel or the occupied territories, nor do other organizations seem to have control of these events. Like the so-called "Arab Spring," viral images as well as social media seem to fuel this renewed conflict.

Many of those committing violent acts seem to be religiously marginal. However, this does not mean that they are not nationalistic nor culturally idealistic. The perceived threat to the Al Aqsa Mosque is not just religious. It can clearly be seen as a national and cultural icon. Additionally, images of young women assaulting Jewish men and suffering violence for their actions results in culturally-driven, chaotic emotions in young Arab men.

The daytime commission of Arab-on-Jewish violence destabilizes daily life in many ways. The use of cutting weapons, knives, and cleavers, and the nature of the perpetrators allow them to blend into foot traffic in Jerusalem more easily. This is in contrast to young men toting AK-47s.

Many of the attackers have their social, economic, and political well-being anchored in the nation of Israel. They attend government schools, serve in Arab-Israeli civic organizations, and vote in Israeli elections. In the second intifada from 2000-

2005, similar tensions arose but for the most part peaceful coexistence has been the norm. Israeli Jewish populations and security forces could assume that persons who were not part of groups like Hamas were unlikely to be threats to Jewish citizens.

While these issues in isolation are complex and confusing to outsiders, an additional perspective needs to be considered. To use the word "axis," the values of all societies and persons can be plotted on a graph with two axes. One set of moral values stretches from collectivism on one extreme to individualism at the other. The second set of human norms stretches from honor/shame to innocence/guilt.

Middle Easterners both Hebrew and Arab tend to be defined by collectivism and honor/shame whereas Westerners identify with individualism and innocence/guilt. It is hard for Americans to comprehend choices which value communal life more highly than individual life and expend energies to protect the honor of the community even at the cost of being seen as personally guilty by society.

Behind this growing violence between the "other" ethnic residents of the Holy Land is another reality driven by biblical injunctions. Jews and Christians struggle with the command given in Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself." The question asked of Jesus in the first century is still being asked today: "Who is my neighbor?"

Some are in communities of faith and are struggling to love in the midst of deep communal distrust and individual anger, seeking to walk humbly with God and all their neighbors.

One Palestinian recounts how becoming a follower of Christ has taught him love and forgiveness for his Jewish neighbors. His words speak of the transformation which Jesus Christ brings to the ethnic hatred and destruction in the world.

HEADLINE

cont. from p. 1

Briefing, on Dec. 3. He pointed out the oddity of a politically liberal news outlet demeaning Republican leaders for reacting to a tragedy by sharing "thoughts and prayers" since Democratic leaders, such as U.S. Vice President Joe Biden and Chelsea Clinton, daughter of Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, made similar statements only months ago after a mass shooting in Oregon.

Mohler declared, "It tells us something about our contemporary political scene and about the continued secularization of America that the words 'thoughts and prayers' have now become a matter of political debate."

Yet the issue is not wholly political, Mohler said. "From a Christian perspective we have to understand that more than a response to the phrase 'thoughts and prayers' is at work here. The New York Daily News after all, in that screaming headline, declared 'God isn't fixing this.' That is something Christians need to note very, very carefully."

There is a deep moral longing in all people for the problems of this world to be solved, Mohler noted. "Christians looking at this have to understand that nothing — no law, no political action can actually solve the problem — can 'fix it,' as the New York Daily News demands, because the problem is in the human heart, not just in the events that come with horrifying headlines."

The insufficiency for governmental, educational, psychological and other solutions to truly fix the problem of human violence points to the necessity and propriety of prayer in the face of murderous evil, Mohler said.

"[The Christian] reflex to prayer is not a matter of public gesture, it is a matter of heartfelt concern, or at least it certainly ought to be," he said.

"Christians looking at this have to understand that nothing — no law, no political action can actually solve the problem — can 'fix it,' as the New York Daily News demands, because the problem is in the human heart, not just in the events that come with horrifying headlines."

R. Albert Mohler Jr.

president of Southern Seminary

"We are both humbled and horrified from the biblical perspective in understanding the brokenness of the human heart that is reflected in the brokenness of the world."

Only God can, and one day will, "fix it," Mohler said. Yet, that doesn't preclude the necessity for Americans to have a meaningful discussion about gun control. "[W]here there is the possibility of doing something that will really decrease the potential for human evil, we ought rightly to do it."

Moore said, "I have no objection to people making the case for tightened gun control even if I don't agree with all their proposed solutions. Let's have that debate. ...The 'prayer-shaming' on social media, however, is not really about that debate at all."

"What most meant by 'do something' was to, well, express

an opinion about gun control on Twitter. Ironically, enough, the 'Don't Just Pray There, Do Something' meme will actually keep things from happening."

"We do believe that God can intervene, to comfort the hurting and even to energize ourselves and others for right action. For those who don't believe in the power of prayer, the last thing any of us should want is social pressure to pretend to pray. What we can expect, though, is for neighbors to express in whatever ways they have, 'We love one another, and we hurt for one another.'"

"When that becomes just another culture war battlefield, we've lost more than a set of policy proposals. We've lost the social cohesion we need to do anything."

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. **Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted.** Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

Truth is not relative.

Find it in the One who is the way, truth, and life.

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

THE VILLAGE VIEW

THE BAPTIST CHILDREN'S VILLAGE



Dr. Rory Lee, Executive Director

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GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

WE WISH YOU A VERY

MERRY CHRISTMAS

AND

HAPPY NEW YEAR

The Baptist Children's Village residents, staff and board of trustees wish you and yours a very special Christmas and a happy, healthy and hope-filled New Year.

BAPTIST CHILDREN'S VILLAGE

DECEMBER 1-13, 2015

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Governor Phil Bryant along with his wife Deborah participated in an annual Christmas event for The Baptist Children's Village sponsored by Harley Davidson of Central Mississippi. Governor Bryant rode his motorcycle in the Toy Run and Mrs. Bryant rode in the caravan with BCV children and staff. He also made remarks at the event in which he shared about his days as a younger man when he and others who were part of a civic organization helped provide a Christmas shopping trip with BCV residents. Pictured L-R are Rory Lee, BCV Executive Director, Chrystelle Thames, BCV Director of Public Relations, and Governor Phil Bryant and Mrs. Deborah Bryant.



Mississippi Men Standing Tall (MMST) donated bikes and toys for The Baptist Children's Village ministry. Pictured are Jeremy Barnes, Brion Guthrie, and Mike Stephens.

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Balfour & Mary Elizabeth
Lipscomb
Mr. & Mrs. James E. Clark
Laura Mashburn
Mr. & Mrs. Arthur E. Bishop
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Ms. Linda T. Milner
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DECEMBER 1-13, 2015

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The King Worshipped • Matthew 2:1-12

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem," Matthew 2:1 (KJV). A key part of our traditional celebration of Christmas is the story of the Wise Men. We sing songs like "We Three Kings of Orient Are." With very little effort at all you can probably remember hearing it sung over the years Christmas after Christmas.

"We three kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar Field and fountain, moor and mountain, Following yonder star. O star of wonder, star of night, Star with loyal beauty bright, Westward leading, still proceeding, Guide us to thy perfect light."

I enjoy the sights and sounds of Christmas and do not want to lessen the joy of our American Christmas traditions. However, when it comes to Bible Study we need to read and accept the teaching of God's word. Most of you are already wondering why I quoted the words of a song that talks of three wise men and with deeper thought wonder why the song calls them kings. The only authoritative source of information and details about the wise men that come from the east to Jerusalem is today's text in the second chapter of Matthew. What can we find out about this story and what message it has for us?

Sometimes the common language of the Message Bible draws our attention to what the Bible says and what it doesn't say. The Message paraphrase of Matthew 2:1 reads, "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory - this was during Herod's kingship - a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East," Matthew 2:1 (MSG). Note the Gospel writer does not tell us how many Wise Men were in the band of scholars that arrived from the East. Also, we are only told these men came from somewhere East of Jerusalem.

They knew when and where to start looking for the King of the Jews because they saw a new star in the sky. The star led them to Jerusalem. The Wise Men told King Herod, "we saw His star in the east," Matthew 2:2b (HCSB). When they proceeded to Bethlehem: "there it was - the star they had seen in the east! It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was," Matthew 2:9 (HCSB).

The clear natural meaning of the scripture is that God miraculously led the Wise Men to Jesus with a star He created for that special mission.

The Wise Men came prepared with gifts to use in worshipping the new King. They brought extravagant gifts to use in worshipping the New King. Our Christmas Carol "We Three Kings of Orient Are" apparently jumps to the unsupported

guess that there were three kings because they brought three expensive gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

There is a villainous and illegitimate Roman appointed king who is a key character in this story. He is known in history as Herod the Great. He was insanely suspicious of anyone who he thought might threaten his power. Because of this suspicion and insecurity, he murdered his wife, Mariamne, and three of his sons. Herod wanted to kill Jesus and tried to trick the Wise Men into finding Jesus for him.

God sent an angel to the Wise Men and sent them away without helping Herod find Jesus. Herod then ordered all Jewish boys two and younger killed in an attempt to kill Jesus and protect his throne. The Wise Men had innocently approached Herod asking for help to find the new born king of the Jews and Herod tried to convince them that he too wanted to worship the baby king.

Under the ruse of offering to help the Wise Men find the Messiah, Herod called the High Priests and scribes in and asked them where the Messiah was to be born. These Old Testament scholars had no problem answering this question. They quoted the Prophet Micah: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler of Israel;" Micah 5:2 (KJV).

God miraculously saved the Baby Jesus and fulfilled the prophecy of Micah. God also sent an angel to Joseph and he took Mary and Jesus to Egypt fulfilling another Old Testament prophecy [Hosea 11:1] and protecting the toddler from Herod.

Hicks is associational missions director for Jasper Association in Bay Springs.



Explore the Bible
with Don Hicks

Saved by God's Son • John 1:1-5, 9-14

"In the beginning..." At the opening of his Gospel, John takes us all the way back to Genesis 1:1. It was the time before there was time, before the heavens and the earth came to be, and yet before it all there was God. In addition, John tells us that existing eternally outside of time and space was the Word. In verse 14, John shows that the Word was none other than Jesus. Before anything else existed, God the Father and Son enjoyed perfect companionship with one another.

Not only was the Word with God, but John says that the Word was God. Two beings that are distinct and yet also the same - it is a concept that may be difficult to wrap our finite minds around, but is a wonderful truth. This is one of the many passages that form the doctrine of the Trinity, which states that while God is one God, he is made up of three persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Throughout the opening portion of the book, John continues to refer to the Word. There are varying thoughts as to why John used this title "Word" as a synonym for Jesus. However, it is interesting to see how this idea parallels Old Testament passages. In verse three, John tells us that all that has ever been created was made through

Jesus, or "the Word." Similarly, in Genesis 1 we see a picture of God creating by speaking. For example, 1:3 says, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." (ESV) Psalm 33:6 reads, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host." (ESV) Furthermore, words are used to express thought. In Jesus, God has revealed himself and his plans to us.

Jesus has always existed with the

Father.

He was not created; rather, all things were created through Him. He is the source of life, and "the life

was the light of men." (John 1:4, ESV) As light shines and illuminates that which was hidden, he has revealed the Truth to us. In Isaiah 9:2, Isaiah prophesies, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined."

(This is then followed by the familiar Christmas passage in verse 6- "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...") In John 8:12, Jesus proclaims, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (ESV)

Verse 5 of John 1 powerfully states that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (ESV) According to Vine's Expository Dictionary, the word translated "over-

come" can have the meaning to apprehend, to attain, to find, to overtake, to perceive, or to take. The light

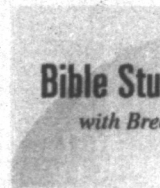
came into the world, and the darkness would not receive it, but it also did not overtake it.

In love and the ultimate act of sacrifice, the Word stepped out of the perfection and glory of heaven and in to time and space. He entered our sin-filled world, taking on the appearance

and limitations of his own creation. Just as God dwelled among his people throughout the Old Testament via the tabernacle and temple, Jesus came and dwelled among us. The tragic reality is that the creation did not recognize or accept its own Creator. "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." (John 1:11, ESV) However, John immediately shows us the beautiful flip-side to this - that to all who did receive him, "who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." (1:12, ESV)

This is what we celebrate this Christmas. Beyond the lights, the bows, the presents, and the activities, at the heart of it all is the astounding miracle of God becoming man and dwelling among us, "and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14, ESV) He not only came, but he came as a humble servant, prepared to die that we might live. He has revealed the Father to us and enabled us to be children of God. His light has shown upon us so that we can know Him, glorify Him, and walk in fullness of life now and forever.

Wooten is a member of Morrison Heights Church, Clinton.



Bible Studies for Life
with Breanna Wooten



The King Tempted • Matthew 4:1-10

"Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve," Matthew 4:10 (KJV). Your Sunday School book recommends that you memorize this verse where Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:13. When we look closely at today's scripture lesson we find Jesus quoting scriptures often. In this passage Jesus is giving strong answers to each of Satan's attempts to tempt Him to abandon God's plan and follow Satan's cheap and corrupt plans.

Life in this world often has the Devil attacking us seeking to lead us away from God's will. We can look at today's Bible lesson and see how our perfect Lord defeated Satan at the beginning of His public ministry. We can study Jesus' actions to find His example for us to follow. The writer of Hebrews tell us that Jesus has complete understanding of the temptations we face. Hebrews says of Christ Jesus: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin," Hebrews 4:15 (HCSB).

Satan felt he had to give his best shot at testing Jesus because God had just spoken audibly from Heaven saying: "This is My beloved Son,

I take delight in Him!" Matthew 3:17 (HCSB). Let's remember what a high hour this was for Jesus, He had just been immersed by John the Baptist in the Jordan River which He had told his cousin, John, was the way to fulfill all righteousness. God sent His Spirit descending like a dove to publicly commend Him.

Jesus was ready to do battle with the Devil.

"Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil," Matthew 4:1 (HCSB). Satan is the chief of deceivers and taunters using every deceitful dare (even double dog darses). The Devil taunted Christ saying: "If you are the Son of God" do this or that - I dare you.

First he said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread," Matthew 4:3 (HCSB). The answer Jesus gave came from Deuteronomy 8:3. He starts out with the formula "It is written:" to emphasize

the power of what He was going to answer since it came from God's written law in the Old Testament Torah. Jesus said, "Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God," Matthew 4:4 (HCSB). Note that Jesus claims that every word in the scriptures comes from the mouth of God. We should accept it completely if God actually said it.



Explore the Bible
with Don Hicks

Remember since Jesus was fully human, He was very hungry when He refused to turn the

little round brown stones into bread. The scripture tells us at this point Jesus was very hungry since he had been fasting in the desert for forty days. So Satan decided to try a different tact, he quoted [or actually misquoted] scripture to Jesus. Still taunting Him with "If You are the Son of God," he added "throw Yourself down. For it is written: He will give His angels orders concerning you, and they will support

you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone," Matthew 4:5-6 (HCSB).

Satan, as is often the case, had a half truth in what he claimed. The angels would take care of Jesus when He was in God's will and it was God's time for them to do that. After the third and final temptation note what Matthew tells us, "Then the Devil left Him, and immediately angels came and began to serve Him," Matthew 4:11 (HCSB).

But when Satan was testing to see if Jesus would misuse the angels' protection, Jesus forcefully told the Devil, "It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God," Matthew 4:7 (HCSB). God allowed one last test, which the Devil used to see if Jesus would worship him. Jesus dismissed the Devil and his temptation saying, "Go away, Satan!" Matthew 4:10 (HCSB).

This third time Jesus once again modeled for us using scripture to withstand Satan's attack, when He said: "Go away, Satan! For it is written:

"Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him," Matthew 4:10 (HCSB).

Hicks is associational missions director for Jasper Association in Bay Springs.

Strengthened by God's Power • Ephesians 3:14-21

Encouragement is something that everyone needs from time to time. We all face challenges and go through difficult seasons, and the early church was no different. The book of Ephesians is full of encouragement from Paul to the church in Ephesus. This is particularly striking considering that Paul likely wrote the letter during his time of imprisonment in Rome. Despite his outward circumstances, Paul had deep joy and strength rooted in Christ, and so can we.

The letter opens with passionate praise. Paul exults in God's plan and work of redemption through Jesus. He goes on to express his care for the believers and explains his prayer for them. Paul reminds them and us of our hopeless and depraved state apart from Christ, and contrasts it with the new life we are given because of the love and grace of God. The Ephesian church was largely made up of Gentile believers, so Paul took care to show how Christ made a way for them to be included in the people of God. Jew and Gentile are no longer separate but have both been saved through the work of Christ. He explains that both are now fellow heirs with Christ and members of God's household.

This brings us to our main text, Ephesians 3:14-21. The section begins, "For

this reason I bow my knees before the Father." (ESV) "For this reason" could be Paul picking up where he left off in 3:1, or it could be his response to the immediately preceding verses. Paul says that he bowed "his knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." (ESV) We see in Paul's example both humility and boldness in prayer. While he assumed a posture of reverence and recognized God's power and glory, he also acknowl-

edged God as Father and says in verse 12 that "we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him." (ESV)

In verse 16, Paul begins to articulate his prayer for the believers. He asks that God would strengthen them "with power through his Spirit" in their inner being, "according to the riches of his glory." (ESV) The word "riches" indicates fullness or abundance. In Philippians 4:19 Paul says that his "God will

supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." God is able to provide for our needs, and his supply never runs out. Paul asks specifically that God would strengthen the believers with power through his Spirit. We as believers today have access to this same Spirit and can ask God to equip and strengthen us. Believers have been given the incredible gift of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit, and in him we have the power that we need to

live the life God desires of us.

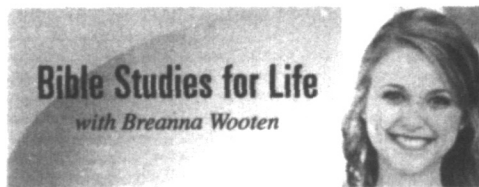
Verse 17 continues by saying "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

(ESV) God doesn't just visit us from time to time. He takes up residence with us. How amazing is his love! Paul's desire is that believers would be "rooted and grounded" in love, that they would comprehend "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." (ESV) The text does not

specify what "breadth and length and height and depth" describe, but it could very well be the love or redemptive work of Christ. We are able to know the love of Christ not only through intellect, but also through experience. While we continue to go deeper and deeper in our understanding of it, we will never fully plunge its depths that surpass knowledge. He fills us, supplies us with all that we need, including grace and strength, and gives us the greatest gift, the gift of his presence and relationship with him.

Paul closes this section with a doxology. He ascribes glory to him "who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." (NKJV) Not only is God capable of doing more than we can imagine, he can do "exceedingly abundantly above" it. May we take time regularly and frequently to dwell on his magnificent love and work of redemption. Be encouraged knowing that the sovereign, all-mighty God cares for you and will provide for your needs. "To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Eph. 3:21, ESV)

Wooten is a member of Morrison Heights Church, Clinton.



Bible Studies for Life
with Breanna Wooten

Moore: Muslim immigrants must hear the Gospel

WASHINGTON (BP) — Christians are missing out on chances to share Christ amid the fearful, hostile discourse on refugees and Muslims that is currently prevalent in the U.S., said Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission during a Dec. 9 discussion on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

"There are many opportunities for people to visibly show the love of Christ that are being evaporated due to fear," he said.

Moore said as a Christian who completely disagrees with Islam, "my response to my Muslim neighbors cannot be one of fear and loathing," he told an audience of nearly 100 people in the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center. "My response to my nonviolent, law-abiding Muslim neighbor needs to be a loving witness to the grace and faith that comes in Jesus Christ, not in a message that communicates, 'Because you're not yet in Christ, you are therefore my enemy to be kept away.'"

Moore's comments came during Capitol Conversations, a periodic panel discussion sponsored by ERLC. The Dec. 9 conversation, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Christian Response," followed two other discussions held in the previous five months. One discussion dealt with same sex marriage and religious liberty while the other discussion focused on Planned Parenthood and the sanctity of human life.

During the ERLC's Capitol Conversations, a former Muslim who is now a Southern Baptist pastor said Christians harm their witness in this country when they call for such actions as halting immigration.

Christians applaud missionaries who risk their lives to take the Gospel overseas, but "when the mission field is coming to us, then all of a sudden we're saying, 'No. Get out. We want protection,'" Afshin Ziafat said.

A Christian's goal "should not be to by all means extend my life but... by all means to spend my life being an ambassador for Christ and seeing the Gospel go out," said Ziafat, lead pastor of Providence Church in Frisco, Texas.

Amid the refugee crisis in war-torn Syria and terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, Christians "cannot be the people who are so fearful of evil that we lose human compassion," and we cannot be "driven by fear in ways that cause us to try to avoid any possibility of risk," Moore said. Christians cannot "sentimentalize ourselves into people who do not understand evil and the capacity of evil in the world," he also said.

Moore acknowledged some of the public discussions are prudent ones about how government should vet refugees to maintain security while doing so with compassion. Some conversations, however, "are much darker and come from a very different place," he said.

The recent conversation about banning Muslims "is something that ought to cause the hair on the back of the neck of every Christian and every American to stand, because this is not only an assault on human dignity and human conscience; it's also an assault on basic religious freedoms ...," he said. "If we don't stand up for those who are unpopular at the moment, we certainly will see those very same impulses being turned against others in the fullness of time."

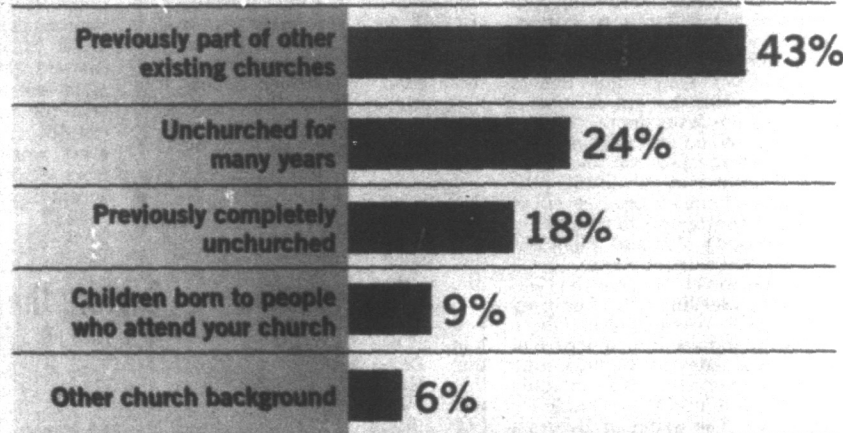
The global refugee problem is greatest in the Middle Eastern country of Syria, where more than 7.6 million people are internally displaced in the face of a civil war of nearly five years and an invasion by the Islamic State terrorist group. More than four million Syrians are registered refugees in other countries, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.



PANEL DISCUSSION — Russell Moore (second from right), president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, comments on the Syrian refugee crisis while fellow panelists (from left) Afshin Ziafat, Jenny Yang, Knox Thames, and moderator Matthew Hawkins listen during a panel discussion in Washington, D.C. (BP photo)

Among American Church Planters:

Of the people who currently attend your church, what is their background?



LifeWay

LifeWayResearch.com

New church plants thriving, attracting unchurched families

NASHVILLE (BP) — America is launching new Protestant churches faster than it loses old ones, attracting many people who previously didn't attend anywhere, new LifeWay Research studies show.

More than 4,000 new churches opened their doors in 2014, outpacing the 3,700 that closed, according to estimates based on input from 34 denominational statisticians. On average, 42% of those worshipping at churches launched since 2008 previously never attended church or hadn't attended in many years, LifeWay Research found in an analysis of 843 such churches from 17 denominations and church planting networks.

LifeWay Research is a division of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention and is based in Nashville.

The church planting study indicates newly planted churches are more effective than existing ones at drawing people who aren't connected with a church, said Ed Stetzer, LifeWay Research executive director. "In winning new converts to Christ, church plants are light-years ahead of the average church because of their focus on reaching the unchurched."

Successful church launches have several factors in common, the 2015 National Church Planting Study shows:

■ **Meeting in a public space.** New churches

meeting in schools have significantly higher worship attendance than other new churches. Those churches report more new first-time commitments to Christ, and are more likely to become financially self-sufficient.

■ **Focusing on outreach.** New churches offering sports leagues, social gatherings, and children's special events are significantly more likely than other startups to be congregations with a majority of people who previously did not attend church.

■ **Supporting their leaders.** Adequate compensation and health insurance for the church planter are linked to higher worship attendance and a greater likelihood of financial independence for the new church.

■ **Starting more churches.** New churches that invest in church planting and launch at least one additional new church in the first five years report higher worship attendance and more new commitments to Christ.

"Healthy new churches have an outward focus from day one, communicating every month that the goal is to be a multiplying church," Stetzer said.

Though some pastors bristle at new churches coming into their community, they have more to learn — and less to fear — from the startup down the street, Stetzer said.

One lesson is the value of time-tested methods. While most church plants use the Internet for outreach, 77% say word of mouth and personal relationships are the most effective forms of publicity. Only six percent say social media is most effective. Sixty-three percent say Bible study is their primary small group activity.

"It's not the most innovative things that matter most. It's the nuts and bolts," Stetzer said. "An existing church can take notice and ask, 'Hey, are we doing those things? Are we making sure people in the community know we exist? Are we inviting people to come and making them feel welcome and all those things a church plant does?'"

In addition, new churches can attract demographic groups that may be largely unreached by existing ones, Stetzer said. Sixty percent of church plants aim to reach a cross-cultural or multi-ethnic group of people from the outset.

"It takes multiple methods to reach a diverse population," Stetzer said. "The United States from its founding has been a very diverse population. A one-size-fits-all church has never been part of the American equation. As much as ever, we need different approaches to reach different types of people."

Additional reports from the study will be available at NewChurches.com.